

The Fit Back Workout

Exercises to stretch and strengthen the back

A back that's fit for life

Do you want to strengthen your back? **Do you have back pain that needs to be controlled? Are you recovering from a back injury or surgery? A fit back workout can help. Your healthcare provider can tailor an exercise program to your fitness needs. The workout takes only a small amount of time each day. Do it while watching TV or even during short breaks at work.**

Doing the workout

Stretching and strengthening exercises help your back stay well aligned and strong. They also train you to use your stomach, low back, and leg muscles. While you exercise:

- Breathe normally. Inhale as you start an exercise. Exhale during the movement. Don't hold your breath.
- Wear supportive shoes.
- Keep a towel and a pillow handy.
- You may feel sensations you're not used to as you stretch your muscles. Your provider can tell you what to expect.
- Stop any exercise if you feel tingling, sharp pain, or numbness in your back or legs.

Keeping your spine in line

Your spine's natural curves are positioned correctly when your ears, shoulders, hips, and ankles line up. Here are some tips for maintaining your spine's natural curves:

- Keep your eyes facing forward.
- Keep your shoulders upright. Don't slouch.
- Pull your abdomen in when you stand upright.
- Bend with your hips, not with your waist.
- Don't twist while lifting.

How your back works

The spine has 3 natural curves:

- **Cervical curve** (neck)
- **Thoracic curve** (mid back)
- **Lumbar curve** (low back)

Maintaining these 3 curves is part of good posture. The curves are maintained when your muscles are relaxed and your ears, shoulders, and hips are in a straight line. This is called a neutral position. In a neutral position, your body's weight or the weight of any object you lift is distributed evenly across the spine. This makes the back less prone to injury.



NOTES

These exercises are safe for most people. Your provider may add special instructions on each page. Some exercises have more challenging variations. Ask your provider before trying these. For each exercise, check the NOTES box for tips to help you exercise safely.

Calf stretch

How to do it

- 1 Position yourself with your arms braced against a wall. Put 1 foot several inches behind the other.
- 2 Bend your front leg, keeping both heels on the floor. Hold for 30 seconds without bouncing. Do this 3 times. Switch legs.

NOTES

- Keep your back heel on the floor and your back knee straight. Keep your back foot pointing straight toward the wall.
- Maintain your spine's natural curves.

Special instructions



This stretch makes the calf muscles in the lower legs more flexible.

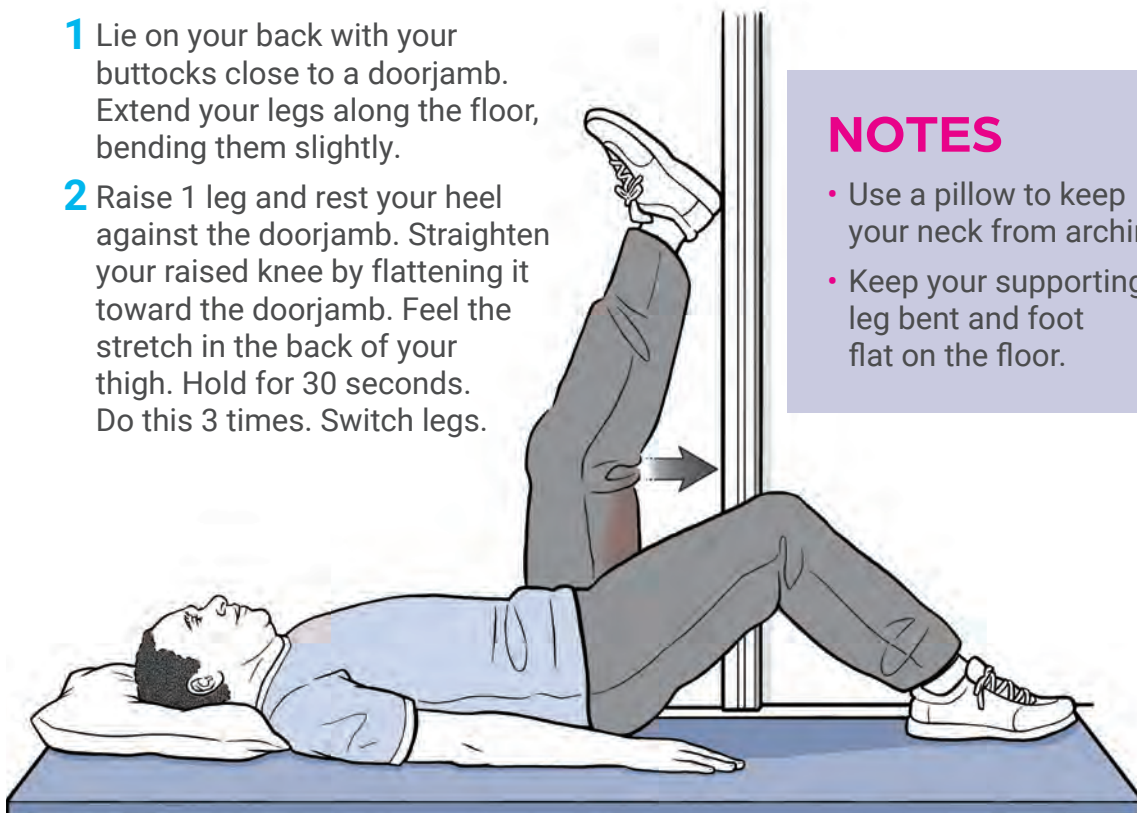
Hamstring stretch

How to do it

- 1 Lie on your back with your buttocks close to a doorjamb. Extend your legs along the floor, bending them slightly.
- 2 Raise 1 leg and rest your heel against the doorjamb. Straighten your raised knee by flattening it toward the doorjamb. Feel the stretch in the back of your thigh. Hold for 30 seconds. Do this 3 times. Switch legs.

NOTES

- Use a pillow to keep your neck from arching.
- Keep your supporting leg bent and foot flat on the floor.

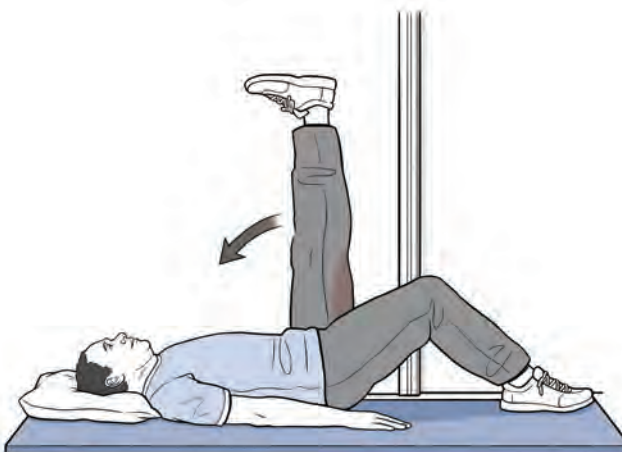


Special instructions

This stretch makes the hamstring muscles in the back of your thighs more flexible.

Challenge yourself

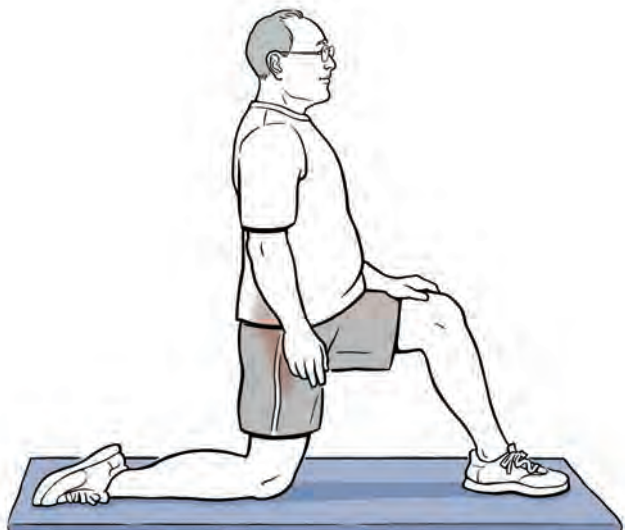
When your leg is straightened against the doorjamb, slowly pull it as close to your chest as you comfortably can. Hold for 30 seconds. Do this 3 times. Switch legs.



Hip flexor stretch

How to do it

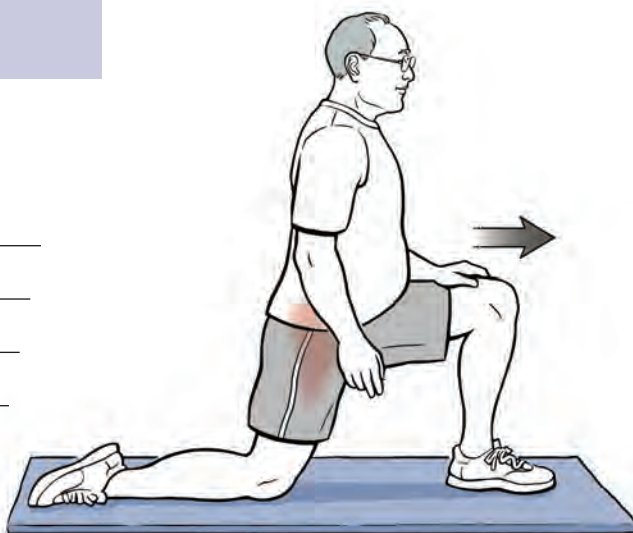
- 1 Kneel on your right knee and place your left foot on the floor about 20 inches in front of you so your knee is bent. If you have trouble balancing, hold on to a chair.
- 2 Tighten your stomach muscles. Move your hips and pelvis forward, keeping your back and shoulders upright. Feel the stretch in the front of your right hip. Hold for 30 seconds. Do this 3 times. Switch legs.



NOTES

- Keep your stomach muscles tight.
- Maintain your spine's natural curves.
- If your bottom knee hurts during this stretch, kneel on a pillow.

Special instructions

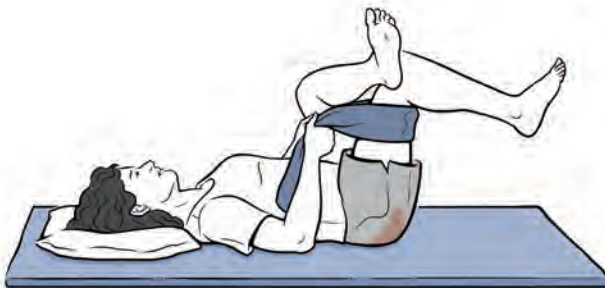


This stretches muscles that help keep the back and pelvis stable.

Hip rotator stretch

How to do it

- 1 Lie on your back with your knees bent. Rest 1 foot on the opposite knee.
- 2 Place a towel behind your bottom thigh. Grasp both ends of the towel. Gently pull your knee toward your chest. Feel the stretch in your buttocks. Hold for 30 seconds without bouncing. Do this 3 times. Switch legs.



This stretches muscles around the hips.

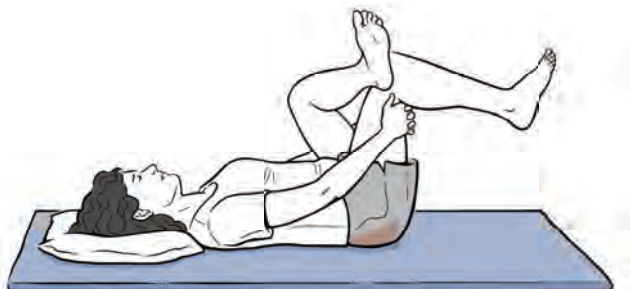
Special instructions

NOTES

- Use a pillow to keep your neck from arching.
- Keep your back and hips flat on the floor.

Challenge yourself

Instead of using the towel, grasp your bottom thigh behind the knee. Pull it gently toward your chest.



Knee to chest

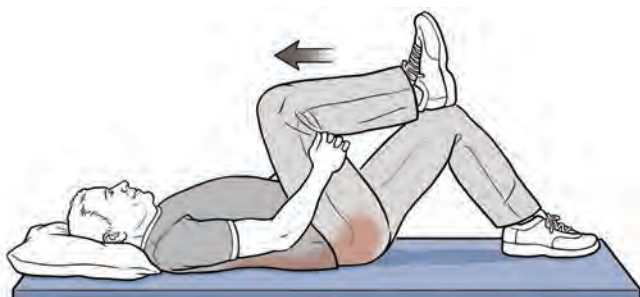
How to do it

- 1 Lie on your back with your knees bent. Keep your feet flat on the floor.
- 2 Grasp your thigh behind the knee and slowly pull it to your chest. Keep your other foot on the floor. Hold for 30 seconds. Do this 3 times. Switch legs.



NOTES

- Keep your head on the floor.
- Use a pillow to keep your neck from arching.
- Keep the foot of your lower leg flat on the floor.



This stretches
back and hip muscles.

Special instructions

Challenge yourself

Sit forward on a chair with your knees and feet shoulder-width apart. Put your arms between your legs. Bend forward until the backs of your hands are flat on the floor. Feel the stretch in your low back. Hold for 30 seconds. Do this 3 times.

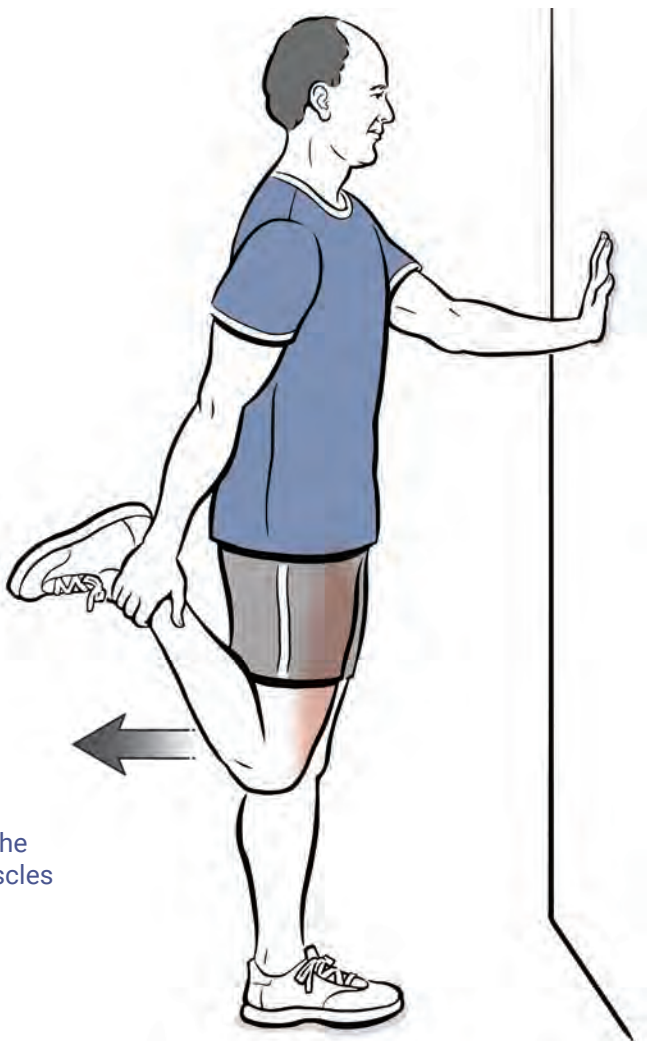


Quad stretch

How to do it

- 1 Stand at arm's length from a wall. Keep your eyes facing straight ahead.
- 2 Place 1 hand against the wall. With your other hand, grasp your ankle. Pull your lower leg straight back.
- 3 When you feel the stretch in the front of your thigh, hold for 30 seconds without bouncing. Do this 3 times. Switch legs.

This stretches the quadriceps muscles in the thighs.



Special instructions

NOTES

- Maintain your spine's natural curves.
- Stay facing forward. Keep your knees together, bent knee pointing straight down.

Partial curl up

How to do it

- 1 Lie on your back with both knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Cross your hands over your chest.
- 2 Looking at the ceiling, tuck your chin to your chest slightly, and tighten your abdominal muscles. Slowly lift your head and shoulders until your shoulder blades are just off the floor. Hold for at least 5 seconds, breathing normally. Then, slowly lie back down. Do this 10 times.



This exercise strengthens abdominal muscles.

NOTES

- Don't pull with your neck.
- Keep your arms relaxed and your low back flat on the floor.
- If your low back hurts, put a rolled towel under it to maintain your spine's natural curves.

Special instructions

Bridge

How to do it

- 1 Lie on the floor with your back and palms flat. Bend your knees. Keep your feet flat on the floor.
- 2 Contract your abdominal and buttocks muscles. Slowly lift your buttocks about 3 to 5 inches off the floor. Hold for at least 5 seconds. Do this 10 times.



NOTES

- Use a pillow to keep your neck from arching.
- Make the exercise more challenging by lifting your buttocks until there's a straight line from your knees to your shoulders.



This exercise strengthens abdominal, buttocks, and hamstring muscles.

Special instructions

Challenge yourself

Do the Bridge with 1 foot raised several inches off the floor. Alternate legs. Make sure to keep your stomach muscles tight.



Prone press up

How to do it

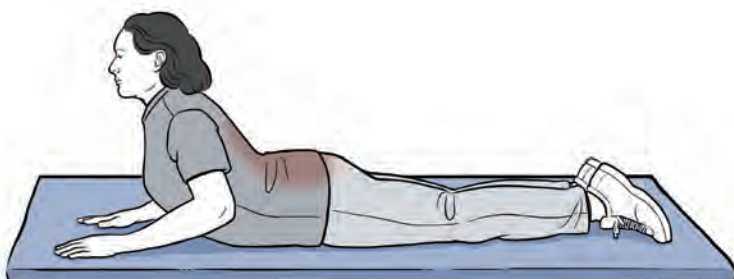
1 Lie on your stomach with your feet slightly apart and your elbows bent. Look at the floor. Relax your stomach and back muscles.



2 Push up on your forearms, slowly arching your back. Continue until your belly button is about to rise off the floor. Hold for 5 seconds, then lie back down. Do this 10 times.

NOTES

- Keep your stomach and hips on the floor.
- Keep your neck straight and ears in line with your shoulders.



This strengthens and stretches low back muscles.

Special instructions

Challenge yourself

Lie on your stomach with a pillow under your pelvic area. Put your hands by your sides. Slowly raise your chest off the floor, placing your arms behind you. Hold for 30 seconds.



Knee lift

How to do it

- 1 Lie on the floor with both knees bent. Put your feet flat on the floor and your arms by your sides. Tighten your abdominal muscles.
- 2 Lift 1 bent knee toward your upper body. Keep your abdominal muscles tight and your back flat on the floor. Hold for 10 seconds. Do this 10 times. Switch legs.



NOTES

- Place a pillow under your head.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles to keep your back flat on the floor.

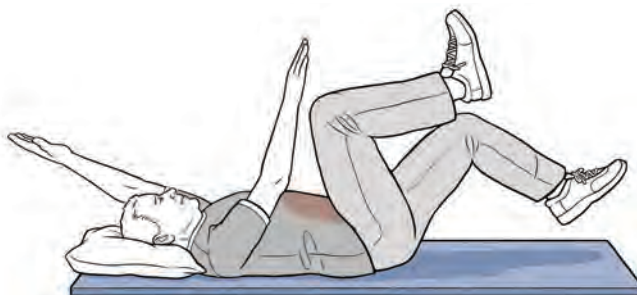
This exercise strengthens lower abdominal muscles.



Challenge yourself

Lie with both knees bent, arms straight behind your head. Lift 1 knee, then the other, moving them in a bicycling motion. As each knee comes toward you, bring the arm on the same side to meet it. Begin with bicycling; work up to adding arms. Do this 30 times (15 with each leg).

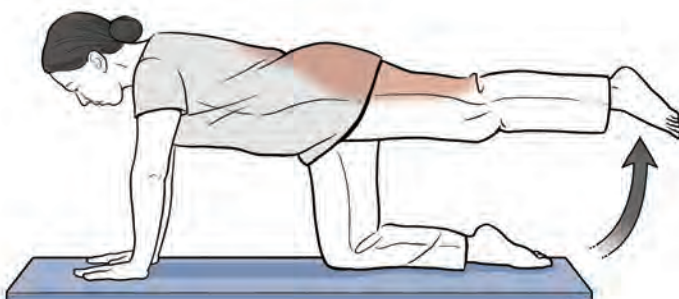
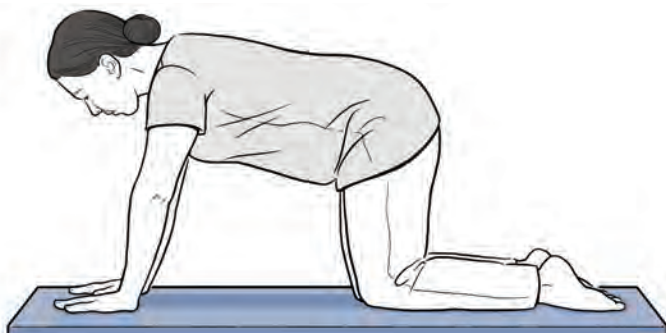
Special instructions



Leg reach

How to do it

- 1 Get on your hands and knees. Keep your knees directly under your hips and your hands directly under your shoulders.
- 2 Keeping hips level and abdominal muscles tight, extend 1 leg straight out behind you until it's parallel with the floor. Hold for at least 5 seconds. Do this 10 times. Switch legs.



This exercise strengthens the small muscles in the back and hips.

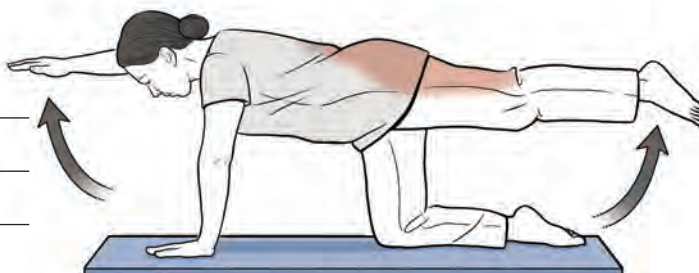
NOTES

- Keep your toes slightly pointed.
- Keep your eyes facing down.
- If your bottom knee hurts during this stretch, kneel on a pillow.

Challenge yourself

Extend opposing arms and legs at the same time.

Special instructions



Wall slide

How to do it

- 1 Stand with your back against a smooth wall. Put your feet at least a foot away from the wall and slightly apart. If you need to, place a rolled towel or stability ball behind your low back to help maintain your spine's natural curves. Relax your shoulders. Tighten your stomach muscles.
- 2 Slowly slide straight down until you're halfway between standing and sitting positions. Hold for at least 10 seconds, then slowly slide back up. Do this 5 times.

Special instructions

NOTES

- Look straight ahead.
- Don't lower your buttocks below your knees.
- Breathe normally.
- Don't let your knees move past your toes.



This exercise strengthens quadriceps, hamstring, and buttocks muscles.



Chart your progress

Check the upper half of the box each day you do a morning workout. Check the lower half of the box if you exercise in the evening. And congratulate yourself for your good work! In return for an investment of a little time each day, you may see results that can last a lifetime.

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Talk to your healthcare provider about adding low-impact aerobic exercises to your workout. Good choices include walking, swimming, and bicycling.

Also available in Spanish

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